

CHAPTER 3

HOUSE OF HAMILTON

The Clan Hamilton, also referred to as the House of Hamilton are a Lowland Scottish clan whose ancestors fled from Scotland to North Ireland in the late seventeenth century as the Covenanters were being tormented during the Claverhouse Persecutions.¹

John Hamilton and Esther (Clarke) Hamilton of Ballykelly, County Derry of Northern Ireland were of the Clan Hamilton. Among the children born to John and Esther Hamilton were their daughter Mary and sons, Robert and Samuel Hamilton

In Northern Ireland, the family scabbled a living farming property in the townlands of Ballykelly and Mulkeeragh. The Hamilton family were members the Ballykelly Presbyterian Church where the children were baptized.² Mary and Robert Hamilton immigrated to the United States in 1843.^{3,4}

SAMUEL HAMILTON

In 1846, at the age of sixteen, Hamilton departed from Liverpool, England aboard the *Elizabeth Denison*, a three-masted full-rigged passenger ship for New York.⁵ Three years following his arrival, in the summer of 1849, Sam Hamilton married Eliza Fagen, the daughter of Northern Irish immigrants and a native of New York. Samuel and Eliza Hamilton would have ten children. Their first child, a son born in New York, passed away before the family moved west. Their second child, daughter Lizette “Lizzie” (b. 1850) was born in New York, then traveled with her mother to California, where her father had previously journeyed and began to establish a home.⁶

SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

In 1851, Sam Hamilton left New York, sailed around Cape Hope to San Francisco, California.⁷ Scholars have often stated that Sam Hamilton arrived in San Jose and reunited with his elder sister, Mary Hamilton. Recent findings suggest that Mary and Robert Hamilton did not arrive in California until 1852 traveling through the Isthmus of Panama, or 1853, traveling through the Isthmus of Nicaragua, depending on which article one chooses to reference.^{8, 9, 10}

Sam Hamilton's wife Eliza and their young daughter Lizzie, who had stayed in New York with her parents, reportedly traveled to California in 1853¹¹ by way of the Isthmus of Panama.¹² Thus lies the possibility that Eliza and Lizzie Hamilton traveled with Mary and Robert Hamilton to California.

Considering the year of their travel (1851-1853), the Hamilton's participated in one of the largest spontaneous migrations in human history to that point in time, as they were among three hundred thousand newcomers to arrive to California in just five years (1849-1854). One result of this mass migration was the newly established population in California was overwhelmingly Anglo-Protestant and willingly embraced the Protestant American myth¹³

Shortly after her arrival, Samuel's sister, Mary Hamilton married Richard Evan Richards in 1854 and two years later, their son, John Evan Richards, was born. In 1863, the family moved to Berryessa, a small farming community in the northeast portion of San Jose, where RE Richards had purchased a ranch. In 1867, Mary Richards was widowed when her husband died from lung congestion. She and her son remained on the

ranch several more years, which allowed for John Evans Richard to attend the public school. In 1877, John E. Richards graduated from the University of the Pacific. He next entered the School of Law at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, graduating in 1879 with a Bachelor of Laws degree. Eventually, he became a Judge of the First District Court of Appeals in San Francisco.¹⁴

As for Samuel Hamilton, he and his young family settled near San Jose, California for the next twenty years. During this time, six children were born: Thomas Scott “Tom” (b. 1855), Adelia “Dessie” (b. 1857), Mary Louise “Mollie” (b. 1861), Eunice B. “Euna” (b. 1862), William John “Will” (b. 1864), Olive Blanche “Ollie” (b. 1867), and George Washington (b. 1869).

The 1860 U. S. Federal Census recorded Samuel and Eliza Hamilton living in San Jose, Santa Clara County, California where Samuel was a farmer owning an estate worth two thousand dollars.¹⁵ On September 3, 1867, Samuel Hamilton registered to vote in the township of San Jose, Santa Clara California.¹⁶

SALINAS, CALIFORNIA

According to the U. S. Federal Census Record taken August 4, 1870, Samuel Hamilton and his family were among the 599 residents living in Salinas City, California. The census recorded Sam Hamilton as a blacksmith, who owned a personal estate valued at three hundred dollars. The children, Tom, Dessie, Mollie, Euna and Will had attended school during that past year.¹⁷ Their first child Lizzie was not on the census, leaving one to question if she ever lived in Salinas with the family. Furthermore, this census

recognizes that the Hamilton family moved to Salinas in 1870, rather than 1871, which has often been suggested.¹⁸

In 1872, Samuel Hamilton signed the Salinas City charter (i.e. articles of incorporation).¹⁹ It has often been stated that a year or two later Samuel Hamilton homesteaded a ranch near King City though no primary reference has ever confirmed this statement.

In November 1875, Samuel Hamilton purchase a sizable piece of property at the corner of Main Street and Central Avenue from the famous Scotsman of Monterey, David Jacks.²⁰ Documents provided by Carol Robles suggest Samuel Hamilton owned property from the corner of Main and Central to the corner of Lincoln and West Market, with the Hamilton family home on the west side of Main, at the corner of Central.²¹ Also mentioned in the township's newspaper, the *Salinas Weekly Index*, in 1893 the presence of a structure referred to as the Hamilton building, at the corner of Main Street and Central Avenue.²²



Main Street looking toward depot, Salinas (1906)

Courtesy of the California State Library

In 1877, the youngest child of the clan, Joseph R. Hamilton was born. The U. S. Federal Census Record for township of Salinas, California, taken June 15, 1880 recorded Samuel Hamilton again as a blacksmith, his wife Eliza as housekeeper, Dessie, 23 and Mollie, 19 dressmakers, Euna, 18 a schoolteacher, Olive 13, and George had attended school during the past year, and Joseph, age 3.²³ Their son William age 17, was not among the family listed, as he was in San Jose attending school while living with his eldest sister, Lizzie and his cousin, John E. Richards.²⁴

In 1882, Samuel Hamilton registered to vote in Salinas, California.²⁵ In September 1883, Hamilton, an accomplished inventor of farming devices, was awarded a

U. S. Patent for a header spring,²⁶ and a few months later, he received a U. S. Patent for a thrashing machine.²⁷ In February 1885, Samuel Hamilton received a U. S. Patent for a plowshare attachment²⁸ and in 1892, for a threshing cylinder.²⁹

Steinbeck, in his book *East of Eden*, mentioned his grandfather's threshing machine. The author also mentioned the Hamilton family lived comfortably but not prosperously, a result of Samuel Hamilton spending much of his money trying to patent his inventions.

As previously mentioned, during his time in Salinas, Samuel established a business and place of residence, named Hamilton's Corner at the intersection of Main Street and Central Avenue. In 1888, the city of Salinas purchased a portion of this property from Hamilton to widen the intersection to a uniform width of 75 feet.^{30, 31} During litigation of the property, Sam Hamilton was represented by two attorneys - T. Beeman and his nephew, J. E. Richards.

It might surprise some to find the National Steinbeck Center just steps from the location of what was originally Hamilton's Corner in Salinas, California.

THE HAMILTON RANCH

It wasn't very long until all the land in the barren hills near King City and San Ardo was taken up, and ragged families were scattered through the hills, trying their best to scratch a living from the thin flinty soil. (East of Eden).

When the Hamilton family moved to the ranch eight miles southeast of King City is not clear. The homestead records for Samuel Hamilton state he settled on the land on August 3, 1887, filed a land claim on August 25, 1887, approved for the homestead on July 27, 1891, and a homestead patent on October 22, 1891.

Within a document titled *Homestead, Pre-emption and Communication Proof: Testimony of Witness*, Samuel Hamilton described the buildings that existed on the ranch in October of 1891. “*We have a house 30x12 ft. with a kitchen 12x12 ft. worth \$250. A summer kitchen 12x12 ft. worth \$25, chicken house worth \$50, a barn 30x40 ft. worth \$300, fencing worth \$75, an artesian well 360ft. deep cost \$1000.*”

Beyond the homestead records other primary resources suggests that after some eighteen years in Salinas, several members of the Hamilton family moved to the ranch (ca. 1889). As stated in the newspaper article announcing Samuel and Eliza's fiftieth wedding anniversary, published on October 29, 1899 “*About ten years ago they selected King City as their home.*”³² And in the 1890 Directory for Monterey County - San Lucas, Samuel Hamilton was listed as a farmer, a recognizable change from his having been identified as a blacksmith during the previous thirty years.³³

A COLLECTION OF HOMESTEAD PROPERTIES

The Hamilton ranch consisted of a collection of family homestead properties. Each of the children, Thomas S. Hamilton, Dessie Hamilton, Eunice Hamilton, William J. Hamilton, George W. Hamilton, daughter - in-law, Adelia H. Hamilton, and two son - in-laws, William J. Martin and John E. Steinbeck, acquired one hundred and sixty acres of homestead property, one next to the other. The resulting assembly of land resulted in a sixteen-hundred-acre ranch eight miles southeast of King City that had access to little water. Two children who did not apply for homestead property were Samuel and Liza Hamilton's oldest daughter Lizzie and youngest son, Joseph.³⁴

In *East of Eden*, Steinbeck describes the process by which Samuel Hamilton gained the ranch property near King City as follows:

When Samuel and Liza came to the Salinas Valley all the level land was taken, the rich bottoms, the little fertile creases in the hills, the forests, but there was still marginal land to be homesteaded, and in the barren hills, to the east of what is now King City, Samuel Hamilton homesteaded.

He followed the usual practice. He took a quarter-section for himself and a quarter-section for his wife, and since she was pregnant he took a quarter-section for the child. Over the years nine children were born, four boys and five girls, and with each birth another quarter-section was added to the ranch, and that makes eleven quarter-sections, or seventeen hundred and sixty acres.

If the land had been any good the Hamiltons would have been rich people. But the acres were harsh and dry. There were no springs, and the crust of topsoil was so thin that the flinty bones stuck through. Even the sagebrush struggled to exist, and the oaks were

dwarfed from lack of moisture. Even in reasonably good years there was so little feed that the cattle kept thin running about looking for enough to eat. From their barren hills the Hamiltons could look down to the west and see the richness of the bottom land and the greenness around the Salinas River.

A DRY ARTESIAN WELL

On June 8, 1890, an article appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle that described Sam Hamilton's extended effort to acquire water for the ranch land in Hamilton canyon (the family's homestead property near King City, California.

A remarkable well, in the canyon that comes into the valley between King City and San Lucas, is worthy of mention here. About three years ago Samuel Hamilton commenced digging and curbing a well on his plain and got it down to a depth of 200 feet. He then got some boring machinery and with sheet-iron pipe sank it at a depth of 175 feet more, when he struck a boulder that the tools he had would not crush. The remarkable performance of the well commenced at this point. It commenced blowing a gale-worse than a Washoe zephyr – out of the pipe and would blow off a dry goods box placed over the well to keep things from falling into it. Its spell of blowing were intermittent, some-what like a geyser, and when it was at rest it gave back a true and perfect echo. At one time when the box was lashed to the top of the well the pipe collapsed its flue, so to speak, down to the 200-foot level of solid ground, dirt not having been filled in about the pipe above that point. This well is not far from the asphaltum beds near King City. Although Mr. Hamilton has already spent \$3000 on the well, he proposes to stay with it, and has engaged Mr. Alsop to see things through.^{35, 36}

It may have been impressed upon John Steinbeck, at an early age, with family stories of the difficult plight of the homestead property in South Monterey County, that the New Eden of the West had a natural ability to rescind its promise of a land of plenty. Carrying these stories with him into his adult years, Steinbeck presented the troubles Samuel Hamilton experienced on the ranch near King City in his book, *East of Eden*.

Samuel built his house with his own hands, and he built a barn and a blacksmith shop. He found quite soon that even if he had ten thousand acres of hill country he could not make a living on the bony soil without water. His clever hands built a well-boring rig, and he bored wells on the lands of luckier men. He invented and built a threshing machine and moved through the bottom farms in harvest time, threshing the grain his own farm would not raise. And in his shop he sharpened plows and mended harrows and welded broken axles and shod horses. Men from all over the district brought him tools to mend and to improve....

Although the hill ranch was large it was abysmally poor. Samuel sunk well after well and could not find water on his own land. That would have made the difference. Water would have made them comparatively rich. The one poor pipe of water pumped up from deep near the house was the only source; sometimes it got dangerously low, and twice it went dry. The cattle had to come from the far fringe of the ranch to drink and then go out again to feed.

Besides the acquiring water on his property via the deep artesian well, Samuel Hamilton and South Salinas Valley experienced a severe drought in the years 1897 and 1898. During this period, many families living in South Monterey County were destitute,

many having to sell their livestock for lack of feed.³⁷ In the fall of 1898, families were needy they pleaded for immediate aid from the State to stave off starvation.³⁸

Published in the *Weekly Sun*, San Bernardino, December 23, 1898 was the following account of the drought impact on South Monterey County: *The members of the California Press Association who were at the San Luis Obispo meeting last April can readily believe the reports of famine and destitution in Monterey and San Luis Obispo counties, in the Salinas valley and vicinity. Even at that time, the land was absolutely barren, not a spear of green being in sight. The mountains were as bare as any part of the Mojave desert in midsummer, and the parched ground showed every evidence of the four years drought to which that part of the State has been subjected.*

*The famine, for such it really is, is not widespread, and according to the best reports, perhaps not more than 200 or 300 people will need help. These are the small farmers who have had no crops for several years, whose livestock has long starved, or have been turned loose to forage for themselves, and who now have no money to purchase their food or clothing, who have no seed for next season, should the year be more favorable, and who are therefore in absolute want.”*³⁹

Not until March of 1899 did enough rain fall to provide a slight relief from this horrendous drought.⁴⁰

A FIFTIETH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Following the traces of Samuel Hamilton and his living in South Monterey County one finds him registering to vote in King City, California on October 10, 1892.⁴¹ Also that year, in the 1892 Directory for Monterey County - King City, Sam Hamilton and his sons' Thomas and William J. Hamilton were recorded as farmers, and George Hamilton, a clerk.⁴²

In October 1899, the Hamilton family gathered at the home of John and Olive (Hamilton) Steinbeck in Paso Robles, California to celebrate the fiftieth wedding anniversary of Samuel and Eliza Hamilton. Present were the children and their husbands and wives. Mrs. JP Farrell of Los Angeles, Mr. and Mrs. WJ Martin of San Francisco. Mr. and Mrs. WJ Hamilton of Salinas, Mr. and Mrs. GW Hamilton of Paso Robles, Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Steinbeck of Paso Robles, Miss Dessie Hamilton of Salinas, Thomas Hamilton of King City and their youngest son Joseph R. Hamilton, who was attending Stanford University.⁴³

On July 2, 1896, Samuel Hamilton registered to vote in San Lucas, California.⁴⁴ Eight years later, on Monday, April 4, 1904, at the age of 74, Hamilton died at his home on the ranch near King City. Two days later, funeral services were held in Salinas, at the home of his daughter, Mrs. J. E. Steinbeck.⁴⁵

His wife of 54 years, Eliza Hamilton stayed on the ranch with her eldest son Tom after Samuel died. After Tom Hamilton's death in 1912, she bought a small Victorian house at 222 Central Avenue in Pacific Grove, where she lived for four years (1914-1918). On May 3, 1918, at the age of 87, Eliza Hamilton passed away at her home in Pacific Grove.

SAMUEL HAMILTON'S PRESBYTERIAN FAITH

Beyond Samuel Hamilton, his sister Mary, and brother Robert, were likely baptized in the Ballykelly Presbyterian Church. Mary Hamilton was described as of the Presbyterian faith, prior to her marriage to John E. Richards, upon which time she converted to the Methodist church.⁴⁶

According to Pauline Pearson in her book, *Guide to Steinbeck Country*, Samuel Hamilton and his family were members of the United Presbyterian Church of Salinas.⁴⁷ During the time the Hamilton family were members of the United Presbyterian, Reverend George McCormick served as the pastor of the Congregation. Reverend McCormick serves as an example of one of the many missionary pastor sent by the ministers of New England's Protestant churches to shores of California.

Born in Spring Run, Pennsylvania, McCormick received his education at Shade Gap and Tuscarora Academy in Mifflintown, Pennsylvania, before attending the Amherst College in Massachusetts. He then attended Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania. McCormick was ordained a pastorate on October 22, 1872, and assumed the ministry of the congregation at Salinas, California in 1873.⁴⁸ Reverend McCormick served as pastor of the Salinas United Presbyterian Church for the next fifty-three years, retiring from the Congregation in 1926.⁴⁹

Beyond the reference provided by Pauline Pearson, other evidence that suggests the Hamilton family were members of Salinas United Presbyterian church, such as the *King City Rustler's* reporting of the funeral for Samuel and Eliza's eldest son, Tom Hamilton, in 1912. As described in the obituary that appeared in the *Rustler*: "The

*services, simple in character, were conducted by Rev. George McCormick of the United Presbyterian Church.”*⁵⁰

Besides Tom Hamilton’s obituary notice, the literary writing of John Steinbeck suggests the family were members of the Presbyterian faith, as exemplified by the character Liza Hamilton, in *East of Eden*, who was modeled after his maternal grandmother. Within the book, Liza Hamilton was portrayed as a dainty Presbyterian woman with a strong sense of morality and a scorn for activities considered enjoyable.

“She had a dour Presbyterian mind and a code of morals that pinned down and beat the brains out of nearly everything that was pleasant to do.”